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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

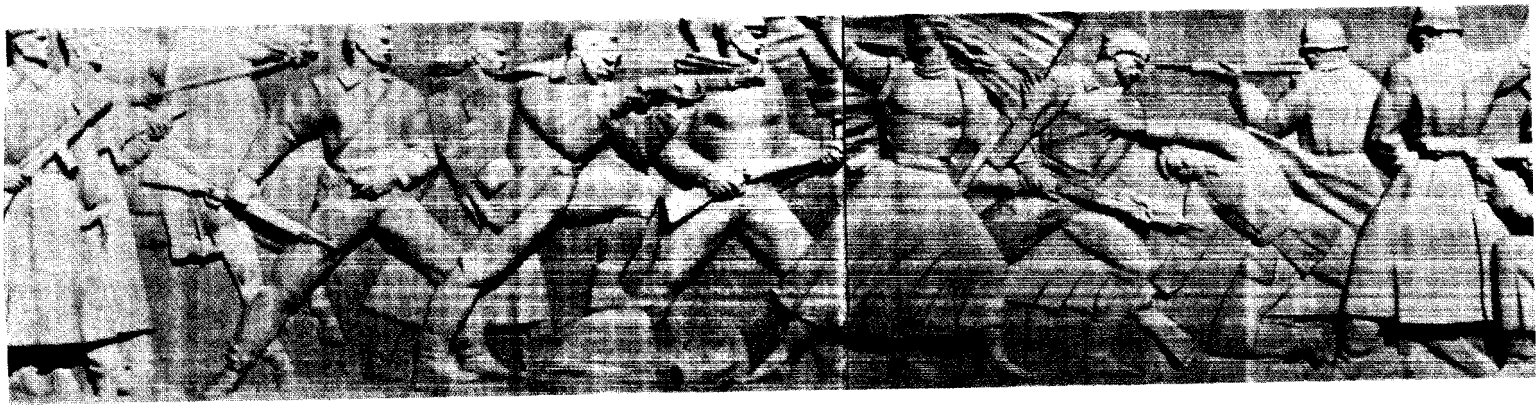
The Role of the Military in the Yugoslav System

Secret

№ 37

20 June 1969
No. 0375/69B

Approved For Release 2006/08/30 : CIA-RDP79-00927A007100070003-6



THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN THE YUGOSLAV SYSTEM

The Yugoslav armed forces, historically a mainstay of the state, have long been faithful supporters of Tito and his nonconformist policies. The firing of Vice President Rankovic in 1966, followed by the decline of his secret police organization, left the armed forces under General Gosnjak as the only organized power group other than the party in the country. The invasion of Czechoslovakia and the potential Soviet threat to Yugoslavia have now led Tito to take steps to diffuse the power of the military and to integrate it with the rest of Yugoslav society.

Anxious to avoid a repetition of the Rankovic affair, Belgrade has decentralized the military's party apparatus along the same lines as the current party and government organization. The Federal Assembly has passed a new National Defense Law that draws the armed forces and civilian population closer together in defense of the homeland and gives more command authority to local officials.

Those few of the military hierarchy who opposed the regime's measures have been gracefully retired. The reorganization of the army's party apparatus now is intended to integrate it more closely with the policies of Yugoslavia's liberal leadership. Various problems inherent in the reorganization, however, raise questions as to its long-term success, and the regime is well aware that there is risk involved in tampering with the military's bailiwick. By instituting these reforms, however, the regime has demonstrated confidence in itself, the military and the Yugoslav system, and has increased its chances for success.

THE ROYAL MILITARY

Today's Yugoslav military establishment is the stepchild of the armed forces of the Serbian kingdom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The officers' corps of the Serb state, having developed an esprit de corps, took upon itself the role of guardian and protector of Serbia's newly won independence. In the tide of chauvinistic sentiment that swelled in the small Balkan kingdom in the late 1800s the military establishment came to view itself as an "elite," tied to the nationalist and conservative moral values of the Serbian peasantry from which it sprang.

The Serb military entrenched itself in Yugoslavia when, out of the chaos and ruin of World War I, the Slovenes and Croats, together with the Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians, formed the kingdom of the South Slavs. Since the Serbian royal house ascended to the throne, its military organization naturally gained a leading role in the new state. The military first played a decisive part in Yugoslav politics in 1929 by helping King Alexander abrogate the constitution and assume full power.

Again, in 1941 the military stepped into the political arena, this time to save the "honor of Yugoslavia" by instigating a coup against Prince Paul for signing the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. A coalition of army officers, students, politicians and orthodox priests rallied around Air Force General Dusan Simovic to oust the regent and place Paul's nephew Peter, on the throne. In the words of Winston Churchill, the Yugoslavs had "saved the soul and future of their country, but it was already too late to save their territory." Ten days following the fascist invasion of Yugoslavia on 6 April, a battered Yugoslav nation surrendered, the royal army crumpled and only remnant forces were able to escape and take refuge in the mountains.

THE PARTISAN PERIOD

Almost by default, the Communists were left to organize the only truly national resistance to the German occupation. Outlawed since 1921, the party had years of experience as an illegal underground organization. Moreover, the Communists were relatively free of factionalism; they were unmarked by the stigma of defeat and unaffected by the divisive nationalisms which tainted the old royal army; and they coalesced under the able leadership of Josip Broz Tito. Numerous young intellectuals and army officers became partisans to fight for Yugoslavia's independence. They injected into this group some of the esprit and idealism formerly attributed to the royalists.

As the war progressed and the guerrilla fighting continued, the Communist party and the partisan military movement became inextricably intertwined, and their identities merged. Under Tito's leadership, the partisans became national heroes and emerged from World War II enormously popular.

The war thus established a bond of trust and confidence between Tito and the military that has lasted to this day—Tito has even given the army the responsibility for his own personal safety. Tito's faith was well-placed, and the armed forces have consistently stood by him in repeated crises. Belgrade could not have broken with Stalin in 1948 without the backing of the military. Again in 1956 the armed forces backed Tito when he renewed polemics with the Kremlin over Moscow's handling of the Hungarian revolution. Tito had the support of the military when he purged former vice president Alexander Rankovic in 1966, and he turned to the army to conduct the investigation of the pro-Rankovic secret police.

THE MILITARY AS A NATIONAL FORCE

The military is organized not only to defend Belgrade's nonconformist Communist policies and

its independence, but also to act as a unifying agent within Yugoslavia's federal system of diverse nationalities. The regime has successfully established a reasonably proportional balance of nationalities in the military hierarchy as a step toward reducing sectional rivalries and prejudices. In the past, Serbian dominance in the armed forces was a major bone of contention—in 1938 all but four of the country's 165 generals were Serbs. Serbia is the country's largest republic and Serbs continue to make up the largest nationality bloc in the military leadership. Currently, considerably less than half the known officers with the rank of major general and above are Serbs, however.

To facilitate the elimination of regional prejudices in the junior ranks, 75 per cent of all recruits are supposed to be assigned to units stationed outside their native republics. This distribution figure may not have been met in actuality. Nevertheless, there is a conscious effort to force the younger generation to broaden their acquaintance with their country so that they may shed the provincial prejudices of their forebears. Young recruits are also exposed to various areas of the country as they take part in the military's program to provide the regime with cheap, mobile labor for public works.

Political education in the armed forces is mandatory for all units, and classroom work emphasizes the virtues of Yugoslavia's self-managing society. Patriotism and the monolithic character of the Yugoslav state are themes repeatedly hammered into young recruits. Vocational training too, has not been shunted aside, and the military offers some of the finest technical schools in Yugoslavia today.

Efforts are being made to lend military education and training an aura of respectability in the civilian world. Thus, at least in theory, academic prejudices against military education will be overcome and the individual can apply elsewhere the skills and education gained in the armed forces.

THE IMPACT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

For over a year prior to its passage last February, aspects of the new National Defense Law had been under consideration in various quarters of Yugoslavia, and Belgrade appeared satisfied with the progress made in debating the proposed changes—until the invasion of Czechoslovakia. This sudden turn of events caught Yugoslavia looking the wrong way. There had been a marked warming of Yugoslav-Soviet relations following the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967 that continued into the first few months of 1968. This persuaded the military to point its defense toward the "imperialist" West. The advent of a new threat from the East alarmed the military, and it responded with determination to fight. Dissension arose, however, over the tactics to be employed for the country's defense.

Disagreement within the military may have stemmed from concern on the part of some generals that the defense strategy defined in the new National Defense Law—since it calls for nearly total mobilization—is too unwieldy and weakens the military in conducting an effective and coordinated defense of Yugoslavia. In addition some undoubtedly felt that "all people's defense" is fine in theory, but in practice it dilutes the armed forces' authority and prestige as defender of the homeland.

Belgrade's strong stance against the occupation of Czechoslovakia obviously depended heavily on the support of the armed forces. In order, therefore, to assure the military's acquiescence, the regime first had to deal with those generals who refused to endorse the chosen line. General Rade Hamovic, inspector general of the Yugoslav People's Army, and several other unnamed

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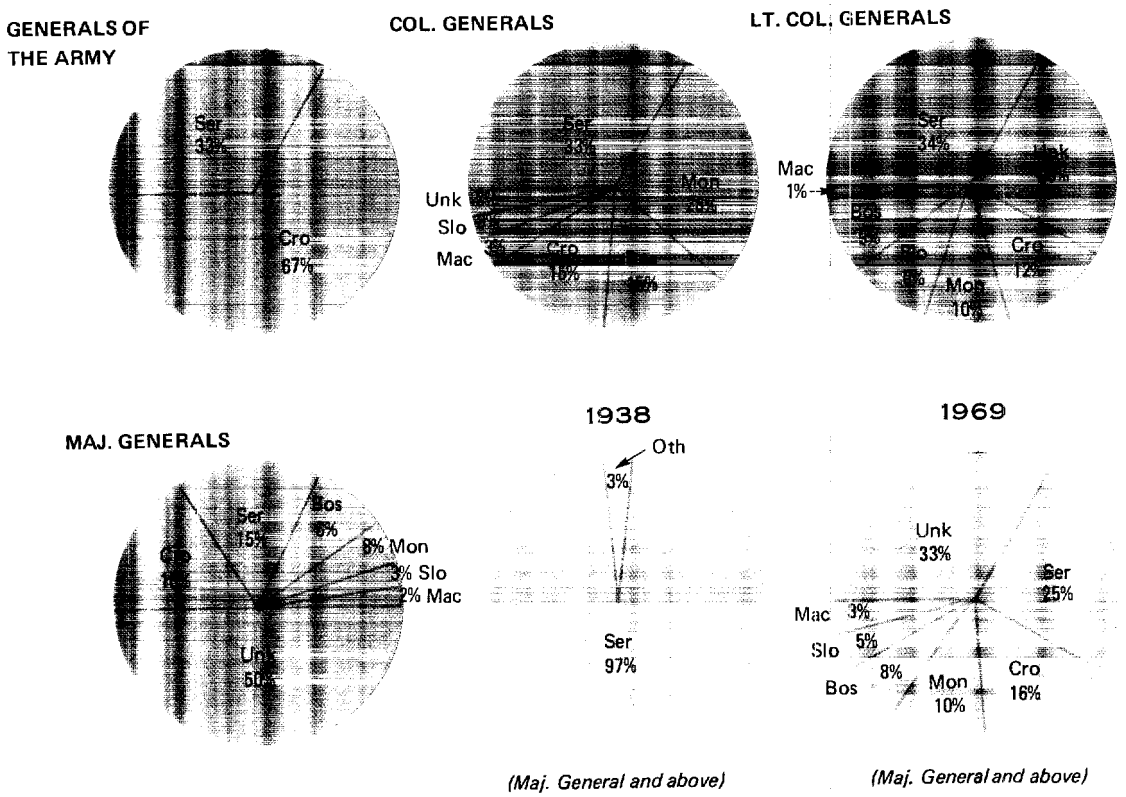
Ethnic Distribution of Yugoslav Officers above the Rank of Major General, 1969



Ethnic Distribution of Yugoslav Population, 1961

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General Rade Hamovic, "Retired" Inspector General of the Yugoslav Armed Forces

generals reportedly felt that, if an invasion came, resistance against the Soviets was hopeless as the regime envisioned it. They considered unrealistic the regime's proposed strategy of "all people's defense." Hamovic was one of several generals who went into early "retirement" last fall. There appears to have been a genuine disagreement and falling-out over specific military tactics. Simultaneously, rumors circulated in Belgrade concerning the existence of a "Serbian Clique" within the officers' corps that advocated closer ties with Moscow.

The strategy proposed for the defense of Yugoslavia is in essence a new version of Tito's successful World War II formula. In addition, it is part of the liberal's drive to gain more control over the military. A major step toward this goal was taken early this year when the Yugoslav Federal Assembly passed the All-Nation Defense Law creating in effect territorial civilian fighting units throughout the country.

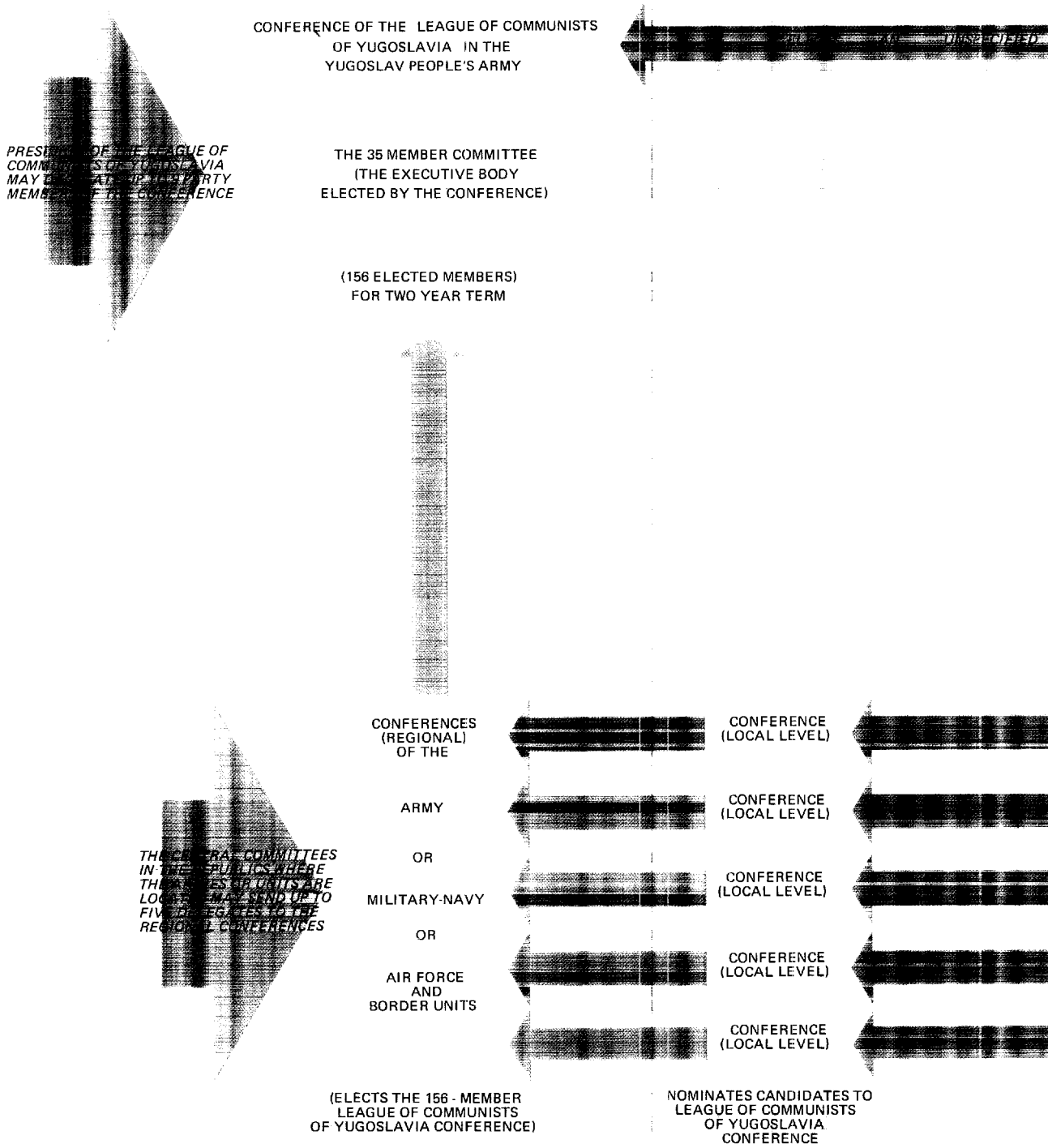
Under the new statute, local and regional authorities are given greater responsibility for military matters including the power to activate these units in initiating armed resistance. Over-all strategy and control, however, remain in the hands of military headquarters in Belgrade. Everyone between the ages of 16 and 65 is required to undergo training in military tactics, first aid, and use of weapons and the strategy of collective defense. With the creation of these military units throughout Yugoslavia the regime builds the image of a military establishment and populace united in the defense of the homeland and confronts the enemy with a formidable foe, at least, in terms of sheer numbers.

Yugoslavia's defense is designed to prevent the enemy from achieving a quick victory and hopefully to put his armed forces in a difficult military and psychological position when his technical and numerical superiorities do not yield the expected victory. Under the new plan, Yugoslavia, if if attacked will be an "unconquerable" fortress—a "hedgehog." By using the term "hedgehog" Belgrade undoubtedly intends a special message for Moscow, since it describes the tactic adopted by the Soviets in resisting the German invasion of 1941. The plan, however, does not call for the Yugoslavs to die to the last man, but is intended to turn all defendable areas into strongholds which the enemy will be able to take only with great losses in men, arms and time. In the final analysis the Yugoslavs will fall back into the mountains and conduct guerrilla warfare, as they did in World War II.

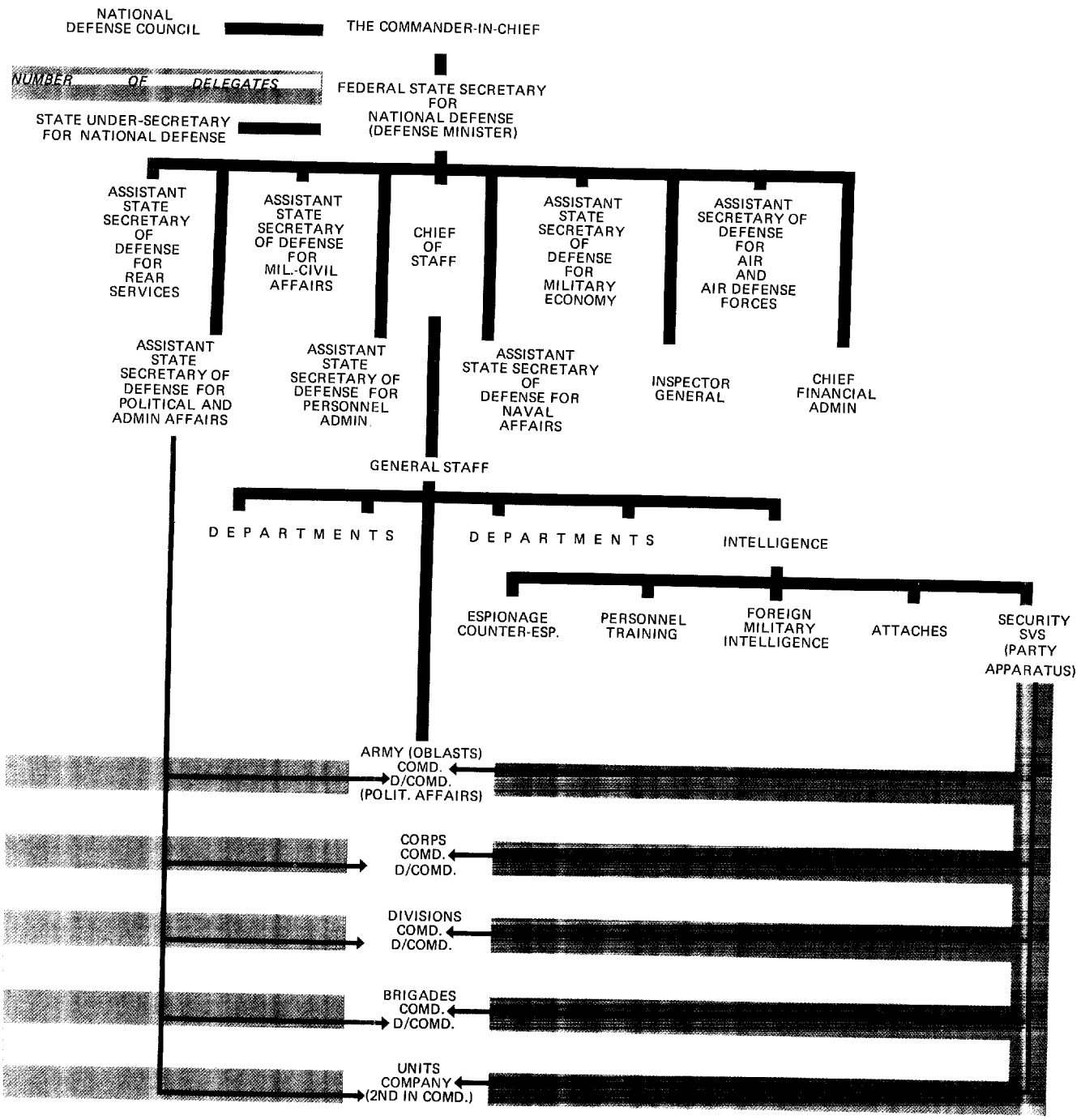
THE PARTY IN THE ARMY

During the last six months Belgrade has vigorously prodded the military to adjust to Yugoslavia's social and political changes. The regime itself, however, bears a great deal of responsibility for the military's dawdling in this respect. Since coming to power Tito and company have

The Party Structure in the Yugoslav People's Army



The Command Structure



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encouraged the military to remain apart from the rest of society, thereby inadvertently fostering the estrangement of some elements in it from society as a whole. Now the need for change is not only an urgent but a more complex problem. The liberal reformers in the party are faced with several major tasks. They must close the gap between the armed forces and the rest of society, and exert greater control over the military. They want to encourage debate and discussion within the armed forces party organs, and generally work to produce more politically sophisticated military personnel.

A fundamental reorganization of the party structure in the Yugoslav People's Army was being drawn up in 1968. The reorganization as it has developed is part of a broader plan to decentralize the military and is intended to integrate the military more fully into Yugoslavia's self-managing society. If successful, the reform should allay concern expressed in some quarters that the army could some day challenge civilian authority.

Under the reform, the party structure in the army will closely resemble that of the republic parties. A People's Army Conference has replaced the plenipotentiary committee as the basic policy-making body of the party in the military. Composed of 156 members, the vast majority of whom are elected through a series of lower level conferences, the conference determines the organization of the party in the military. It elects an executive political body of 35 members, called the Committee, in addition to a number of other steering bodies.

Formerly, personnel in key policy-making bodies in the party organs of the People's Army were appointed by the party central committee. Now, delegates are elected in regional conferences for two-year terms to the conference. In fact, all party bodies throughout the People's Army will be elected by the party members in the military.

Under a new statute enacted by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) in the People's Army, the central committees of the republic parties, as well as the provincial, city and commune organizations, are to maintain regular ideological and political ties with the party organs of the People's Army in their areas. The object of these contacts is to increase civilian influence and cooperation with the military party organizations and vice versa.

The reform gives the military's party apparatus broader and more direct associations not only with its own membership and with the presidium (where it has three representatives), but with the republic and local party organizations in the areas in which the units are located. At the very least, Belgrade's purpose in the reorganization is to draw the armed forces out of their isolation and to allow them to identify their future with the liberal party leadership. Conversely, the government hopes the military's strong penchant for Yugoslav nationalism will be absorbed by the parochial party organizations of the various republics.

Party membership is an unspoken prerequisite to a successful career in the armed forces. In June 1968, there were 73,198 party members in the military, out of a total of nearly 250,000 men on active duty. The most recent figures on the distribution of party members in the armed forces hierarchy published in the December 1968 issue of the military journal Narodna Armija, show that 83 percent of the armed forces' leadership are party members, including nearly all the officers and over three quarters of the NCO's. In contrast, only 11 percent of the draftees were listed as being party members.

General Ivan Gosnjak
of the Council of National Defense

TOP MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Responsibility and authority in the military have been divided so effectively that no one man looms above all others as General Ivan Gosnjak once did. Gosnjak, a long-time and trusted friend of Tito, was for years considered among the front runners to succeed the aging Marshal. Since 1966, when Gosnjak relinquished his position as head of the army's political organization, his political power and prestige have gradually declined. In 1967 he was transferred from the post of national defense secretary and appointed deputy president of the Council of National Defense. Technically the council is the highest defense policy-making body in the country, but in practice it has been little more than an advisory body. More recently Gosnjak was listed simply as a member of the council. It is now evident these moves were the first steps in the current drive to decentralize authority in the armed forces and to preclude its use as a political power base.

The man who replaced Gosnjak as defense secretary in May 1967 is General Nikola Ljubicic. Ljubicic, a Serb who commanded the platoon guarding Tito's partisan headquarters during World War II, is, like Gosnjak, an old friend of Tito's but is described as devoid of political aspirations.

MILITARY SPENDING

The military is and will remain a vital factor in the regime's reckoning, and large amounts of federal funds are channeled into the armed forces. In 1968, military spending totaled 59 percent of the federal budget, and this year the military is taking a slightly larger bite of federal funds—60 percent of the total budget. In addition, under the new national defense law, republics and communes are expected to pay for supplies for the new territorial units out of their own funds. It should be noted, however, that a great deal of what is considered in Western countries as being included in federal expenses—such as social welfare expenditures—is left to the individual Yugoslav republics. For this reason, the proportion of military funds in the federal budget gives an exaggerated impression of the regime's defense spending.

Consistently high military expenditures have raised a number of questions, particularly from

Col. General Nikola Ljubicic
Yugoslav Defense Secretary

liberals who would prefer to see the bulk of these funds transferred to Yugoslavia's economic reform programs. Defense Secretary Lujbicic and other military leaders have openly defended these expenses as necessary to maintain a modern, well-equipped army, a goal they have never achieved to their satisfaction. Some rank-and-file officers would prefer to see more money being channeled into salaries, military pensions and better housing facilities.

Although the military usually does not get all the money it requests, the criticism of the military budget shows little sign of having influenced federal allocation of funds. Since the Warsaw Pact military invasion of Czechoslovakia last year, the number of persons advocating a reduction in military expenditures appears to have dropped considerably.

OUTLOOK

The prospect of military reform raises the touchy question of political tampering with the prerogatives of the armed forces—which on past occasions has strained army-party relations. For example, in late 1967 the party theoretical journal Kommunist chastised both the party and the military for intransigence. The periodical criticized the party for concerning itself with "trifling" problems and routine matters, such as discipline—which was not its concern—while the military was censured for clinging to positions incompatible with LCY ideology.

Ideally, the new system of party conferences will create a forum for thrashing out army-party differences and a "democratic atmosphere" within the armed forces, without destroying discipline. The principle of single command remains, but the military's attitudes nevertheless are in for some basic rethinking if the armed forces are to "adjust" to the new party organization.

The further decentralization proceeds, the more it will result in some dissatisfaction. There already have been indications of opposition to the introduction of the new defense policies, and latent discontent with government military policies has cropped up in several quarters of the armed forces. These indications of dissent, coupled with the "early" retirement of General Rade Hamovic, may be symptomatic of broader discontent among the military with the party's liberal leadership, its policies and the LCY's attempts to assure its control over the army.

For the time being, the party liberals appear successful in their drive to decentralize the military's power base, but their victory could be costly and only momentary. Traditionally, the Yugoslav armed forces have been an elite group—both under the royal regime and the Communists. The military's knowledge that its support has spelled the difference between success and failure for the Tito regime has undoubtedly bolstered its feeling that it has a special, "privileged" position in the Yugoslav power structure. A key factor, therefore, in the continued success of the military reforms will be the regime's agility in carrying through the program without threatening too much the armed forces' vested interests. Moreover, decentralization of the armed forces runs the danger of stirring regional nationalism. The territorial defense units, in particular, could provide the foundation for republic armies. The prospect of local officials distributing arms is somewhat frightening and could prove dangerous in the long run in view of Yugoslavia's omipresent nationality problems. The recent violent flare-up of "unarmed" Albanians in Kosovo illustrates the danger inherent in giving Yugoslavia's hot-tempered nationality groups weapons which they might eventually turn on each other.

Despite the inherent risks, the liberal leadership in Belgrade apparently believes it must

proceed with its attempts to drag the People's Army out of its isolated position, familiarize it with Yugoslavia's problems and bring it into touch with much of the rest of society. The period of adjustment following Tito's departure is bound to be critical, and the military's identification with and support of the liberal leadership's goals is imperative because the armed forces remain to this day Yugoslavia's only national force and its sole force for stability in periods of stress. [redacted] 25X1

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